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# RURAL SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS AND EQUIPMENT.

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## PLAY.

"There is no agency known to man making so much for physical and mental development, for quickness of body and mind, for poise, self-confidence, ability to correlate mental and bodily action, and above all for that vague thing called personality, as play."—*Bulletin on Physical Education, Department of Public Instruction, Indiana.*

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"Play that is wisely organized and effectively supervised will produce and conserve health; counteract fatigue; make children and adults happy; arouse interest; sharpen the wits; overcome awkwardness; develop strength, endurance, and bodily control; and secure obedience, ready response, respect for rules and regulations, orderly conduct, courtesy, self-restraint, self-control, love of fair play and the habit of playing fair, loyalty, honesty, sense of justice, and a sociable spirit. Health habits—physical, mental, and moral—are formed through play."—*Course of Study, Physical Education, Denver, Colo.*

"Every child has the inalienable right to be born free from disease, free from deformity, and with pure blood in its veins and arteries.

"Every child has the inalienable right to be loved; to have its individuality respected; to be trained wisely in mind, body, and soul; to be protected from disease, from evil influences, and evil persons; and to have a fair chance in life. In a word, to be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord."—*The Indiana Child Creed.*

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## THE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND.

Unfortunately many schools have been located in very poor places. Obviously the top or the side of a hill does not make a very satisfactory playground. Neither does rough or stony, swampy or undrained, ground prove entirely satisfactory.

In the first place, then, the school grounds should receive some attention, unless perchance the schoolhouse has been well located, with good playgrounds available.

If it is only a question of rocks, trash, brush, or shrubbery, let the pupils engage in a general clean-up campaign, assisted if necessary



by others. There is no reason why the children should not be taught to maintain a clean school ground, nor why they should not help to remove the loose stone, etc. Still the members of the school board are responsible, and should, of course, direct the work and furnish the labor necessary to remove timber, brush, trees, etc.

Why trees should be tolerated as substitutes for first base, possibly second base, and occasionally even third base, particularly when the trees are located near the center of what should be the playground, is an enigma. Trees around the edges of the grounds are not only attractive, but highly desirable, but never advisable in the playground. A good windbreak is a decided asset. With a row, or, better yet, two rows of trees, along the north side of the school grounds, the school will be much better protected against wind, snow, and blizzards. Again, trees properly placed are of considerable value, but on the playground there is no more excuse for their existence than there is for keeping the Christmas tree in the schoolhouse from one year to another.

The school ground that needs drainage is common. Usually, however, such grounds can be remedied by a small drainage ditch, or better yet by the use of tile where necessary. A ditch around the lower side of the grounds will aid materially in keeping the school grounds drained. Frequently, all that is needed is a few loads of dirt, sand, or gravel, or cinders placed in the low spots or holes that retain the water. There is no excuse for allowing the school grounds to resemble a lake, following a rain. Leveling often overcomes the water holes and improves the drainage.

If the school has been located on a hill, part of the school ground should be leveled somewhat, if possible, in order to permit the playing of both baseball and volley ball.

Ordinarily the school grounds are large enough in the smaller schools to afford ample opportunity for organized play. Yet school houses and outbuildings are frequently placed in such positions that it is impossible to utilize the school grounds to the best advantage. Naturally it is clearly out of the question to remedy this in many cases. Still, in rebuilding, the buildings should be placed so as to give the maximum amount of room for both playground and agricultural plats, etc.

At the present time many schools are ruining, to a relative degree at least, their playgrounds by putting in sidewalks. Side walks can be put in without running them diagonally across part of the playground, thus interfering with the playground. It is advisable to run the walks to the outbuildings, not diagonally across the school grounds, which is very commonly done, but with the main walk leading directly to the rear of the school grounds, and with smaller walks paralleling the rear fence to both the girls' and boys' toilets.

It is undoubtedly advisable to fence the school grounds, particularly if the school is located on a main, traveled road. Children inevitably find their way to the roadside. This becomes dangerous, for in their play the children may entirely forget automobiles, etc. A fence is also a safeguard to the school property, and often prevents molestation from stock and campers. A factor usually overlooked is that of an exit at the rear of the school grounds, when fenced. Some provision should be made for the children to get in and out of the playgrounds. Baseballs will always be batted over the fences, and unless provision is made, both fence and clothing suffer. Clothing will be torn, pupils will trip and fall, and the fence will be abused unless provision is made for the children getting in and out of the playground.

Grass adds materially to the value of the school property. If well sodded, the children can play when otherwise the grounds would be muddy and slippery. Prairie grass is to be found on the majority of the school grounds here in Kansas, but many grounds are absolutely barren. Blue grass or other suitable grasses may well be sown unless the soil is so infertile that even weeds will not grow. Thickly sodded grass helps to keep out the weeds.

The practice of many janitors and teachers of throwing out cinders without regard to the school grounds is to be deplored. What possible excuse can there be for dumping the cinders in a big pile just off the steps or walk? It is not unwise to utilize the cinders in making a walk, if walks are needed, or in filling up a low place on the school ground, but throwing the cinders out indiscriminately should not be tolerated. The cinders not only mar the appearance of the school grounds, but decrease the amount of play-yard ground that should be available for the use of the children.

In placing permanent playground apparatus, it should also be remembered that it is not necessary to put in seesaws in the middle of the playgrounds, and that volley-ball posts interfere considerably with baseball. Improperly placed playground equipment can be a nuisance; it is if it is on what should be the baseball diamond. Seesaws, swings, turning bars, giant strides should almost invariably be placed near and paralleling the fence.

If permanent equipment is placed on the side of the schoolhouse opposite the large playground, the smaller children will be in no danger of batted balls, etc. The larger pupils are less likely to interfere with their play, and in turn the smaller children will enjoy a greater freedom in the use of the apparatus, and will, of course, keep out of the way of the older children in their play.

#### FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE CHOICE OF APPARATUS.

In the selection of equipment and apparatus the enrollment of the school, the average attendance and the wide diversity in ages must always be recognized. Failure to take cognizance of these two factors



is well illustrated throughout Kansas in the smaller schools with their unused basket-ball courts. A few years ago basket ball sprang into popularity. Basket-ball posts soon dotted the grounds of the rural schools. Basket ball was played intermittently for two or three years, seldom longer. To-day basket ball is seldom played in the country schools. Why? The average school's enrollment is too small for basket ball. The wide diversity in ages prevents at least half of the pupils, and perhaps a larger percentage, from playing. Basket ball is a much more strenuous and more intensive game than football, and pupils widely varied in age and size can not successfully play such a vigorous game. Few country schools have 10 boys or 10 girls near enough the same size to play basket ball. And largely because of the small enrollment in the average school, basket ball has failed.

With an average attendance of 14 pupils,<sup>1</sup> the opportunities for play are somewhat limited. Many counties have still smaller enrollments. The average attendance of the one-room schools in a few counties, for illustration, is as follows (taken alphabetically) : 7, 14, 8, 16, 17, 10, 10, 19, 18, 14, 16, 10, 13, 15, 20, 6.

Since approximately 40 per cent of the pupils, then, are in the primary grades, a certain amount of equipment is necessary for these pupils. Too often the little children are entirely overlooked in the selection of apparatus. On the other hand, the other 60 per cent are seldom, if ever, properly and adequately supplied with equipment for organized play.

Another factor, namely, the cost of equipment, should also be considered. It is not advisable to buy the finest and most expensive volley ball made. The country school does not possess a model gymnasium floor. A ball for outdoor use is needed. It is much more economical, and will of course give longer service. On the other hand, cheap or inferior goods, made of poor material, are extremely expensive in the end because of their short life. The purchase of well-made equipment that will give long and faithful service is by all means advisable. Buy wisely.

#### FINANCES.

Considerable pedagogical paraphernalia has been sold in the past to school officials by persistent agents, but few school boards have either purchased or made playground apparatus largely because of the common impression that "exercise" takes the place of "play," or, in other words, the country child having many chores and other work to do does not need to play.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the average attendance for the one-room schools of Kansas, as shown by the twenty-first biennial report of the Kansas State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the years 1917 and 1918.



Prejudice and conservatism are much less factors to be contended against in introducing playground equipment to-day. The disclosures of the draft boards during the war, showing the poor physical condition of the Nation's young men, destroyed many of the old illusions. The need of physical education and the importance and value of play in the curriculum are comparatively well recognized.

Without question it is as clearly the duty of the school board to furnish adequate playground apparatus and athletic equipment as it is to furnish the schoolroom with desks, maps, globes, and other well-recognized necessities. No longer should the teacher and the pupils be forced to purchase apparatus, books, and equipment by capitalizing the school entertainments. Heretofore, and, yes, even at the present time, additional equipment has been secured and is being secured by using the proceeds of the school's entertainments. Books, maps, globes, flags, and athletic equipment are necessary, and yet the teacher should not be expected or forced to supply the school with these articles from the proceeds of the pie socials and box suppers. Not that these entertainments are not of value, nor that they are undesirable, for they are of considerable value and add much to the community's interest in the school and furnish an opportunity for the teacher and the parents to get acquainted, as well as offer the pupils some excellent training.

What manner of man or woman could expect the pupils and their teacher to earn money to paint the schoolhouse? Yet paint is no more essential than either books or playground apparatus. Furthermore, although the teacher and the pupils may help, the school should pay for playground apparatus, maps, libraries, etc.

If the school board absolutely refuses to furnish any funds for the purchase of equipment, the teacher can still, with the aid of her pupils, present a program of some sort, add the irresistible attractions of a pie social or a box supper, and make money enough to buy some equipment. The proceeds of a single entertainment will often enable the teacher to buy a few pieces of apparatus. This is frequently the teacher's only alternative.

The resourceful teacher can usually find material enough to make an excellent program, and ordinarily a social can be added to further the school's funds. The movies attract many people, but old-fashioned entertainments are still popular. Shawnee County, Kans., has revived the old fashioned spelling matches. Preliminary spelling matches were held in every school, and the school's three best spellers were selected. These three pupils entered the township contests. Five pupils were selected in the township contests, and these five pupils entered the big county contest where prizes were given to every contestant, all of whom had won previously in the township elimination contests. In nearly every contest the entire community

was invited to attend. Following the pupils' contests the "old-timers" frequently "spelled down." In some schools the younger pupils gave a short program also. Other talent, usually musical, was utilized in many schools.

Almost invariably the evening program included a social of some sort. Mr. Josiah Jordan, county superintendent of schools of Shawnee County, believes that the teachers and the community should get together occasionally, that community spirit should be developed, and that playground apparatus is essential. Accordingly, he urged the teachers to advertise their meetings, provide whenever possible for socials, etc., and that the proceeds be used for the purchase of playground equipment. Several hundred dollars' worth of equipment was added as a result of the County Spelling Tournament.

Teachers should not hesitate to ask the school board for playground apparatus. If the school-tax levy is low, which is usually the case, suggest to some influential man or woman in the district that the annual school budget be raised. If an itemized bill for playground equipment were presented at the annual meeting, the chances are that it would be voted down, since many people still object to paying anything for "playthings." Yet the small additional tax would scarcely be noticed, and the heaviest taxpayers would pay but very little more. If it is a live community, lay the cards on the table and ask for equipment; it will be voted. If, on the other hand, the community is conservative, ask the school board for money to buy a little material and let the pupils build some homemade equipment. With an increased budget, money should be available.

Playground equipment would be an innovation in many communities, to be sure, but it is none the less essential.

#### EQUIPMENT AND APPARATUS.

The following equipment for the average one-room country school is suggested by the writer: Two playground baseballs; two playground baseball bats; one pair jumping standards; one sand pile; two seesaws; two swings; one turning bar; one volley ball, net, and posts; six bean bags for indoor use; one *Games for the Playground, Home, School, and Gymnasium*, by Miss Bancroft, published by Macmillan Co., New York, \$1.50; one *Bulletin on Physical Education*, published by the State Department of Education of Indiana (send 15 cents to George E. Schlafer, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Ind., for a copy).

The preceding list includes the minimum equipment and apparatus that should be placed in every school. Other equipment might be added, but the essentials for a small school are included. A larger selection might well include the additional articles: One giant stride, one slide, one tether-ball post, six tether balls, four tennis



rackets, one tennis court with net and posts, one pair flying rings, one trapeze, one soccer football.

#### THE SEESAW.

The seesaw is in universal use. Properly built, the seesaw will afford considerable exercise and entertainment for the younger pupils who are too small to participate in organized games. Its popularity is unquestioned. Although not used every day, it is in frequent use, and may well be placed in every school.

#### SWINGS.

The swing, too, never loses its popularity, and, like the seesaw, its popularity is unquestioned. It furnishes the smaller child recreation and exercise. From a physiological viewpoint, although the child may not get as much exercise from swinging as could be had through various ring games, the child gets considerable active exercise. Without swings and seesaws, simple apparatus to be sure, the younger children are at a loss for "something to do"—the eternal cry of the country child. If the teacher gets out on the playground, as, indeed, she should be required to do, her time is almost entirely given to the larger and older pupils in their organized play, thus leaving the younger pupils without guidance or anything to do. The larger pupils will also occasionally use the swings. Two swings should be by all means included in the permanent playground equipment for the average rural school.

#### THE SAND PILE.

A sand table is one of the requirements for standardization of schools in Kansas. It is true that ordinarily a sand pile will not be used by very many pupils for any length of time. Yet, the beginners, and even the older boys, have an instinctive desire to dig. School grounds very commonly exhibit the handiwork of cave diggers. During the early fall and in the spring a sand pile will be used regularly. It may well be inclosed by a concrete or wooden curb.

#### THE TURNING OR HORIZONTAL BAR.

With a good turning bar, properly placed, many an otherwise idle minute can be utilized by the boys in doing stunts, in chinning contests, and in "showing off." This is the simplest apparatus that can be placed on the school grounds, and yet offers the larger boys an unusual opportunity to do stunts, etc., when the playgrounds can not be used because of rain or snow. When time is not available for organized play, the boys will turn to the horizontal bar for a few minutes' recreation. If for some reason several pupils are absent from school, leaving too few present for organized games, the bar will furnish a means of entertainment for those present. With the

ever-increasing emphasis being placed on individual athletic tests, the horizontal bar is absolutely essential, inasmuch as it develops the boys' ability in chinning contests. The pull-up, or chinning contest, is included in practically all grade-school athletic meets at the present time. As a corrective for round shoulders, the horizontal bar has but one equal, volley ball. For this reason, if for no other, it should be placed in the country school. Round shoulders and wing shoulder blades are much too common, and the bar will help incalculably in correcting the harmful effects of poor posture.

#### JUMPING STANDARDS.

Since county athletic meets are becoming popular, the need of jumping standards is obvious. Guesswork does not encourage high jumping. Good standards, giving heights, further the interest in high jumping, increase rivalry or competition, and give the individual an incentive to improve his former records. High jumping, as well as broad jumping, appeals to the instincts of the boy, and of the girls also in a minor way. Without jumping standards, little preparation for athletic meets can be made.

#### PLAYGROUND BASEBALL.

Baseball, notwithstanding the fact that it is undoubtedly the finest game ever developed, can seldom be played satisfactorily in the average small country school, because (1) of the small attendance, (2) the difference in the pupils' ages, and (3) the lack of equipment.

Still, almost every school tries to play baseball. Without gloves—and few schools have more than one or two, which belong to the boys—the smaller boys and the girls often are unable to play. The larger girls, however, frequently play as well as the boys, and occasionally better. The larger boys rarely welcome the smaller fellows, even if their teams are very small; the little fellows make so many “outs” and fail to catch the ball so often that the youngsters are usually crowded out of the game. When the little fellows do play, they seldom, if ever, hit the ball when at bat, and if, being out in the field or stationed on one of the bases, a hard-batted ball or a hard-thrown ball comes toward them they may or may not catch it.

Playground baseball, however, with the larger and softer ball, enables all but the primary pupils to play baseball. None of the skill of the regular game is sacrificed. The only difference in the rules to be noted is this—the pitcher throws the ball underhand. Much easier to bat and to catch, the child has no fear of the ball. Girls who have not played baseball with its hard ball will welcome the newer game. Every player will strike out less often when at bat, and the smaller pupils can bat it as well as the older and more experienced pupils. Since the softer and larger playground baseball requires no gloves, only the ball and bat are needed. Utilizing



the majority of the pupils, playground baseball is ideally suited to any school. Organized play is best.

#### VOLLEY BALL.

After the baseball season closes volley ball should be taken up and played whenever the weather permits until the warm days of spring return. Basketball, it was noted earlier, is not suitable for the average country school, because of the small enrollment and the wide variance in ages. Volley ball, however, like playground baseball, enables all but the primary pupils to participate in the game. Simple, and ordinarily not highly organized, volley ball is well suited to the average school. The girls will enjoy this game as much as the boys and will be able to compete against the boys very successfully. The younger boys, too, will be able to join in the game with considerable enthusiasm.

Volley ball is an excellent game to introduce for one, if for no other reason, namely, batting the ball over the head over the net corrects round shoulders and increases chest expansion, thus improving the posture of the players. Any number of players may participate in the game—from 2 to 10 on a side works well, 6 being an ideal team. Difference in size and age counts for little in volley ball in comparison with many other games.

The volley ball may be used for other games, such as Necomb, end ball, and captain ball, each of which is an excellent game and should be mastered by the pupils. These games furnish excellent training for more advanced and more highly organized games and should precede volley ball and basketball.

#### BEAN BAGS.

For rainy weather, when it is impossible to use the playgrounds, bean bags furnish satisfactory equipment for a large number of indoor games. To simply toss them about affords some exercise and recreation. When used in simple indoor games the children forget the weather and enjoy the indoor play almost as much as more strenuous outdoor play.

#### HOMEMADE OR MANUFACTURED EQUIPMENT AND APPARATUS.

Naturally manufacturers who make a specialty of the manufacture of playground apparatus can offer superior apparatus. Without question the heavy fittings and frames offered by the manufacturers are superior to homemade frames constructed of wooden poles with homemade fittings. Much stronger, and accordingly safer, as well as much more durable and attractive, manufactured apparatus should be purchased whenever possible. The first cost is higher, it is true, but the first cost is practically the only cost, since the heavy galvanized frames and fittings are indestructible, or almost permanent.

The galvanized pipe for the frames can ordinarily be purchased locally much cheaper, owing to the saving in freight. This is the usual practice.

If sufficient funds for the purchase of manufactured apparatus are unavailable, homemade apparatus can be built at comparatively little cost. Satisfactory and serviceable apparatus can be built, and although the life of the apparatus may be shorter and the ultimate cost greater, there is no question but that homemade apparatus should be built if it is impossible to get manufactured apparatus.

From an esthetic viewpoint, homemade apparatus is not as attractive, perhaps, as manufactured equipment, but if properly constructed and properly placed, homemade apparatus is not unattractive. Paint and varnish will add much to the appearance of the apparatus, and will in turn improve the appearance of the school grounds. Too often the fact that the community is judged, or advertised, by its school is overlooked by the school patrons. Strangers and visitors judge a community by the school, and it therefore behooves the school to show its progressive spirit by adequately equipping the playground attractively.

Athletic equipment obviously must be purchased; homemade string baseballs no longer suffice. Baseball bats made of a board or a limb of a tree seldom prove satisfactory.

Baseballs and bats, volley balls and volley ball nets, swings and seesaws are just as essential in promoting the best interests of the school as dictionaries and globes, maps and charts, or desks and blackboards, and should be by all means provided. A small annual appropriation for athletic equipment will keep the school well supplied with the necessary essentials for organized sports.

In purchasing athletic equipment too much emphasis can not be placed upon the quality of the articles obtained. Business should be transacted only with reliable manufacturers who guarantee their products, and in turn with dealers who sell only well recognized brands. The potential service that can be had from a playground baseball or a volley ball, for illustration, should be recognized in the selection of these articles. Cheaply manufactured goods are usually unreliable; the first cost of good equipment may be higher, but in the end the better equipment is far less expensive than the cheaper articles.

#### CARE OF EQUIPMENT.

Through thoughtlessness or carelessness valuable athletic equipment is too often left on the playground overnight. The dew, the frost, showers, or rain will ultimately ruin leather goods. It goes without saying that athletic equipment should be properly cared for and protected against the elements.

Baseballs and volley balls are also too often used when the covers become water soaked. This, too, does not add to the life of the ball.



If the grounds are wet and muddy, leather athletic equipment should not be needlessly sacrificed, and that is virtually what it means when leather goods are used continually in bad weather.

A common habit of the boys, namely, the batting of rocks, scraps of wood, and even tin cans with the baseball bats, should be stopped. No baseball bat will stand this abuse without being marred, bruised, and scratched.

A rough stone foundation may make an excellent backstop in a baseball game; but the rough, sharp edges of the ordinary stone foundation will inevitably be instrumental in wearing out the baseballs. It is seldom necessary to utilize the end of the schoolhouse for a backstop. Avoid the foundations whenever possible. Hedge fences, because of the thorns, may also well be avoided. Many a punctured ball follows an encounter with a hedge thorn.

When the seams of a ball rip, instead of continuing the use of the ball, put in the stitch in time that saves nine or more. Sewing up a ball when the seams are ripped saves the ball. Good wrapping string and a darning needle, together with a conscientious workman—teacher, pupil, mother, or father—will nearly always save the ball.

Volley balls, soccer balls, etc., should always be carefully laced. Be sure that the rubber bladder is protected. Furthermore, the leather thong with which the ball is laced should be tucked inside the cover—never used to carry the ball, hold, or throw the ball. Keep the ball properly inflated.

A good case in the schoolhouse, under lock and key, should be provided. Athletic equipment should be placed in the case when not in use.

When the pupils return from the playground after recesses and noons, the athletic equipment should be brought into the schoolhouse. No one knows when a sudden shower or rain will drench everything left outside. Volley-ball nets or tennis nets may ordinarily be left out throughout the day, unless the weather is threatening. They should always be taken down and placed inside the schoolhouse at night.

If the rope used in the swings becomes either frayed or rotten, it should, of course, be immediately taken down and replaced. Unless replaced, the rope may break at any time and endanger the life of the pupil using the swing.

Taps, bolts, and set screws occasionally work loose in playground apparatus. All playground apparatus should be regularly inspected. Tighten up the taps and set screws, if necessary.

Good apparatus, though either homemade or manufactured, has no complicated parts needing constant attention, seldom needs repairs, causes no worry, and insures safety. Permanent apparatus, if galvanized, needs no attention. Wooden frames, on the other hand, should be painted regularly to afford protection from the elements.

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